

She Should Run: *An Interview with Laura Ross*

She Should Run is a campaign schools initiative organized by the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) Canada Region. The campaign aims to launch non-partisan “campaign schools” where women can come to learn about the processes of running for public office. These campaign schools, which usually take the form of short conferences, follow the CWP’s framework; they consist of various sessions and modules created specifically to support women entering the political sphere. The Canadian Parliamentary Review spoke with Laura Ross, Chair of the CWP Canada Region, to find out more about *She Should Run*.

Interview by Elena Senechal-Becker

Canadian Parliamentary Review: What is the main objective of the *She Should Run* campaign and how will you go about reaching those objectives?

Laura Ross: Our objective is to have more women seeking public office. Whether that be federally or provincially, territorially, on city councils, municipalities, school boards, anything like that, we need to have more women involved in public office, because at this point our number of female representatives is very low.

And how do we do that? By educating women and by encouraging women. CWP is a non-partisan organization and we’ve got members from all parties. We want to ensure that partisan politics doesn’t muddy the waters. Our vision for *She Should Run* and CWP are totally aligned; it’s a non-partisan non-profit promoting leadership and encouraging women from all walks of life to run for public office. But in order to do that, we have to educate them and encourage them. That’s where the campaign schools initiative came forward. We’re putting forward an introduction, an information session, where women can come to find out what *She Should Run* is all about, and then, from there on, we are going to be running a campaign school.



Laura Ross

Elena Senechal-Becker was the Canadian Parliamentary Review’s editorial intern in 2019.

CPR: Can you tell us a bit more about the organizations that are listed and detailed in the *She Should Run* pamphlet? What is the relation between these organizations and the campaign?

LR: The beginning part of the pamphlet is like a literature review. It's resource material, so that women and organizations can say: "What are other people doing? What are other organizations doing within Canada, within North America, to encourage more women to seek public office?" It addresses the campaign school framework, it touches on different organizations, what they are doing, and women can then use this as a working document. The remainder of the document is to set up a framework to indicate how to put together a campaign school. They can then say: "Okay, this is what I need to do, and this is how I'll be moving forward." We want to encourage them to reach out past their local sphere of influence and spread the net wider. It's an educational tool.

CPR: Where did the idea for the campaign, as it exists now, originate? Can you pinpoint a moment where you had the "spark"?

LR: I had attended a campaign school in 2008 put on in Nova Scotia by their women's department staff.

It had always intrigued me to replicate that. When I had the opportunity to become chair of CWP Canada Region, I promoted it along with the other women on the steering committee. I fully believe that this is the way we are going to be able to move this forward. The title says it all; we kept it simple. When you're talking about a woman or to a woman, you say: She's got the leadership skills, she should run! It captures the imagination.

CPR: Do you have a specific target audience for this project?

LR: I don't want to prescribe a specific audience. All women are underrepresented. What we want is women from all walks of life, from all backgrounds and different ages. There are women of all ages, especially older women, who own their own skin, know who they are, and have the ability to really step up into that leadership role. I even want to cast that net wider, so that all women can see themselves there. Once women decide that they want to do this, we are there to teach the skillsets, the tools, the nuts and bolts you need to pursue a campaign. We want to serve all the women in our communities.